

https://dspace.org/

Local council's response to street homelessness in Welkom

Okumu, Moses

2006-10-26T07:12:20Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/1448

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

CHAPTER 4: STREET HOMELESSNESS IN WELKOM

This chapter sets to examine the characteristics of the street dwellers in Welkom. The results are based on responses to open-ended interviews, carried out during October 2004, with a sampled group of pavement dwellers. In addition, the chapter investigates how the local authority is addressing street homelessness in Welkom. The Appendices consist of the questions on the socio-economic background of street homeless people, position of Welkom local authority on the problem of street homelessness, and a list of relevant statistic tables.

These questions constitute information such as age, gender, marital status, education, occupation, security and source of livelihood. While some questions involve socio-cultural information such as colour, ethnicity and nationality; other questions concern issues of former abodes of the homeless people and length of time spent on the streets. Other questions in this chapter, relate to the causes of homelessness, from the perspective of homeless people and their protracted solutions. Equally considered, are the consequences of homelessness. The research using its findings, will try to present the council's response to homelessness in its jurisdiction. It will also present a holistic view of the problem from the victim's perspective.

While it is not my intention as a researcher to investigate into the people's race, ethnicity and national backgrounds, I felt that this information was critical in addressing issues of cross-border migration, socio-economic imbalances, cultural stereotypes and their influence on homelessness in our society. Equally critical, was the search for a correlation between the findings of this study, and the selected literature review on the subject of street homelessness. Out of a total population of an estimated 150 street homeless people in Welkom, only 10 street people were interviewed, which represents only 6.6 percent of the homeless street population. Out of this, 7 (70 percent) were men and 3 (30 percent) women. From the sample of 10 out of 150 homeless persons, it became clear that men are increasingly, drifting into homelessness.

From the results of this study, one may conclude that 7 out of 10 homeless people are men. However, it is critical to note that the findings provided by only 6.6 percent of 150 homeless people in Welkom, cannot be projected as conclusively representing the entire population on the streets of Welkom. The implications are that results are liable to change, if the study extended its parameters to cover a wider area of sample, of about 50 to 80 people; representing either 33.3, or 53.3 percent, as compared to only 6.6 percent of this study.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STREET HOMELESS PEOPLE

TABLE 1: AGE

Age in Years	Men		Women		Total	
	Men	%	Women	%	Total	%
0 - 19	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
20-29	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	10
30-39	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	10
40-49	3	42.8	3	100	6	60
50-59	2	28.6	0	0.0	2	20
60 & above	0	0. 0	0	0	0	0.0
Total	7	100	3	100	10	100

Source: ***Field study, 2004.***

According to table 1 above, the age of the homeless street population was distributed as Follows: between the age groups of 20 – 29 and 30 - 39 men were represented by 14.3 percent each. While between the age groups of 40 – 49 and 50 – 59 men were represented by 42.8 and 28.6 percent, respectively. 100 percent of women were aged between 40 and 49 years. These results indicate that the problem of homelessness is pervasive between the age of 20 and 49, and it remains unresolved, as evidently demonstrated, by 61.4 percent. However, it starts declining in the age group of late 50's, represented by 28.6 percent. Evidence seems to demonstrate that homelessness is rife among economically active groups. Being dynamic and energetic, young people migrate from rural areas to urban places, to seek economic independence and better services.

Mr. K, the youngest in the group, pointed out that it is normal for young persons like himself (at 22 years of age), educated or uneducated, to move out of their parental homes to become responsible. He claimed that he left his parental home in Qwa Qwa, to seek employment in the mining industry in Welkom, in vain. He attributed his failure to secure employment, lack of adequate education, limited and competitive opportunities. Mr. T aged 57, (and homeless) from Natal, added that unemployment makes people desperate, ending up on the streets, where they continue the search for survival. He said that he had been on the streets of Welkom since his retrenchment in 1994. He said that a decade on the streets without going home was enough for one to never imagine any other home, except the streets. According to him, he would love to go home, but for reasons best known to him, he rather, spent the remaining part of his life on the streets. For him, housing in Welkom would be the best option.

It is possible that for 10 years without communication, Mr. T had severed ties with his family members. His return home to Natal without financial security to support his family, would make him into a laughing stock of the community. Culturally, for an African man to be respected and dignified, he must demonstrate an ability to provide for his family's basic needs. Since Mr. T (given his circumstances), could not fulfill these responsibilities, it was better that he stayed away from community embarrassments and humiliations.

TABLE 2: ETHNIC GROUP

Ethnic Group	Men		Women		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Xhosa	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	10
Zulu	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	10
Sotho	5	71.4	0	0.0	5	50
Tshwana	0	0.0	3	100	3	30
Total	7	100	3	100	10	100

Source: ***Field Study, 2004.***

Table 2 above, represented ethnic groupings as follows, both Xhosa and Zulu share 14.3 percent equally, while both Sotho and Tshwana have 71.4 and 100 percent respectively with Tshwana constituting only females. Although South Africa is a multiracial society, the study suggests that most black people were homeless on the streets of Welkom. Although the study is not extensive enough to demonstrate this fact conclusively, one cannot deny an estimated 150 black people on the streets of Welkom as substantial proof. Some may argue against the relevance of an ethnic-centred study, yet it was relevant in identifying the most affected communities. It made it easier to correlate theories with the reality on the ground. The fact that Welkom's racial composition was not representative on the streets, clearly demonstrates a reminiscence of the Apartheid legacy, of socio-economic discrimination against mainly black South Africans.

Mr. T. said that it was a black man that was separated from his family in the rural areas, to work in the mines for low pay. In other words, it was a black man who earned less. Hostels were built for none, but a black man. “Fanagalo” was a language developed for a black man in the mines. It assumed significant influence over the use of international languages such as English. “Fanagalo” was typical of Bantu education from classroom to places of work. It was a black man that was retrenched and left without source of income. It was none, but a black man that was evicted from the mine hostels, and left in the cold streets to die there. Without job alternative, without money to return home, or rent a flat, without support of any kind, black people, drifted into the abject poverty, characteristic of street homelessness.

Mr. T. added that the high number of black men on Welkom’s streets, demonstrates the effect of cultural influence on black people. A black man is culturally the source of income, and prime breadwinner of his family. This belief has enormous consequences on the behaviour, and actions of a black man. Men must, therefore, migrate from their rural homes in search of economic viability in urban areas. Failure to access employment, (having spent everything one had on arrival into the cities), retrenchments and poverty, coupled with a fear of the humiliation associated with an inability to provide for the family, automatically leaves the black man a street dweller. The consequence of this is severed family ties, broken families, and marriages (characteristics of 66.6 percent of divorced Tswana women on the streets of Welkom).

TABLE 3: MARITAL STATUS

Marital Status	Men		Women		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Married	3	42.8	0	0.0	3	30
Single	4	57.1	1	33.3	5	50
Divorced	0	0.0	2	66.6	2	20
Total	7	100	3	100	10	100

Source: ***Field Study, 2004***

Table 3 above, shows the percentage of men and women married, divorced, or single. Married men constitute 42.8 Percent. Divorced women comprise 66.6 percent, and 57.1 percent of men and 33.3 percent of women are single. The table demonstrates a high percentage of single men and divorced women, living on the streets of Welkom. The possible explanation for a high rate of men living a single life, on the streets of Welkom, could be attributed to black South African community's culture of "lobola". Divorce could be connected to a long absence of a husband from his family, due to reasons such as those we discussed under ethnic grouping, under the subtitle of cultural stereotypes.

A black man, who intends to secure a marriage with a lady from another family, is required to pay a number of heads of cattle to the family of the lady. Without strong financial back-up, it becomes almost impossible for a young man to afford the "lobola". Going out to look for employment, to earn some income towards this end, becomes inevitable. However, with limited and competitive opportunities, it becomes almost impossible to secure a reasonable job, to earn a reasonable income. Without an income,

“lobola” becomes a nightmare for an African man, leaving him, a single life as alternative. In order to avoid community challenges, and reprimands, these people drift into the streets, where they live in solitude.

While on the one hand, the table shows a low percentage rate of married men, it demonstrates a high percentage rate of divorced women, on the other hand. The only explanation given by each of the three married men, was that their wives were too elderly to contemplate divorce. According to them, if it were not for their age, they did not believe that they would still be married, given the length of time they had spent on the streets. Divorced women claimed that they were still sexually active, to tolerate their husbands’ lack of conjugal responsibilities. It is in accordance with African culture, for a man to provide for his family needs, with the wife as the principal beneficiary. The disappearance of men from their homes left women without support. With families to care for, and without husbands to provide, their needs led them to divorce. However, they regretted that this did not help them either, because their attempt to seek employment in cities, towards their economic independence, landed them on the streets.

While in cities, they discovered that urban areas (like rural places), were, but source of poverty. Asked whether they had no relatives, or friends to rely upon for help, they all replied that if they had, then they would not be languishing on the streets. However, some reiterated that their relatives were already taking care of their children. Empathizing with their relatives, some homeless people argued that it would be a serious economic burden for their relatives, if they were to accord them, the same courtesy. This provided them enough reason for migration from rural areas, to seek employment in cities. They landed in Welkom Goldfields, with high hopes. However, after a length of time, coupled with a lack of a sufficient and stable income, the situation deteriorated quickly and without alternatives, the streets became their only hope.

Asked why they chose to live on the streets and not in a township like Thabong, both men and women replied that it would be possible, if they knew somebody there in person. Otherwise a certain amount of money would be needed by the Township committees, if

they were to secure a stand on which to raise a shelter of their own. Since finance is their major problem, this alternative is just out of their reach. According to them, homelessness would not be a problem, if the government provided them with employment. They argued that some stable income could relieve their and their families' basic needs. They further argued that although they had no advanced skills to earn them adequate income, the level of education some had attained would enable them to work as domestics, entrepreneurs, secretaries, bricklayers and electricians. According to them, their fate was in the hands of the government's concession to help them.

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF CHILDREN

Number Of Children	Men		Women		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
None	5	71.4	0	0.0	5	50
1 – 3	0	0.0	1	33.3	1	10
4 – 6	1	14.3	1	33.3	2	20
7 – 9	1	14.3	1	33.3	2	20
Total	7	100	3	100	10	100

Source: ***Field Study, 2004***

Table 4 above, demonstrates that while 71.4 percent of men had no children, 28.6 percent of them had an average of 6 children. Amazingly, the 71.4 men without children fall under the active age group of between 20 and 49 years. While we expect this group of

people to be actively involved in raising families, the opposite is the case. This could be simply explained in terms of what we discussed previously, about the African culture of "lobola". Mr. Nyandoro aged 37 said that it was difficult for young men born in poor families, without income, to contract marriage in an African context. He argued that unless the African culture of lobola is revaluated, in the light of the current socio-economic developments, the meaning of family (which was once a symbol of pride in traditional African society) is bound to disappear.

The meaning of family once held in high esteem in traditional African society, is at the risk of disappearance. True or false, people living single lives (for whatever reasons) continue their prolific childbearing out of wedlock. Hence creating a society where respect for the dignity of the human family, and responsibility, no longer matters. Having said that, it could be possible that even the 71.4 percent of men, who claim to have no children, as demonstrated by the study, had children whose responsibility they had escaped. Should this be the case, then, it is important, that the African culture of "lobola" is revaluated.

Although table 4 above, had indicated men having 28.6 and the women 100 percent of children, they do not live with them on the streets. The only man working in the mine had his family of five, a wife and 3 school-going children with him. However, given his meager salary, things weren't fine for him either. When the other members were asked how their children were coping in life without their support, they replied that their children were under the custody of the relatives. Asked whether or not those arrangements were temporary, they replied that their children's stay depended entirely on the charitable compassion of their relatives. Asked whether, or not, they were happy about the arrangements, their reply was that happy or not, they had no choice. According to them, those children deserved better; hence their plea to the government to improve their situation.

TABLE 5: EDUCATION PROFILE

Educational Profile	Men		Women		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
None	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	10
Sub A – B	0	0.0	1	33.3	1	10
Std 1 – 4	2	28.6	1	33.3	3	30
Std 5 – 8	1	14.3	1	33.3	2	20
Std 9 – 10	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	10
Matric	2	28.6	0	0.0	2	20
Tertiary	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	7	100	3	100	10	100

Source: *Field Study, 2004.*

Evidence from the field study in table 5 above, revealed that 57.2 percent of men and 100 percent of women interviewed on the streets of Welkom, had an education between Sub-B and standard 10. 28.6 percent of men had attained a matric level of education; while 14.3 percent of them, were literally illiterate. None of the women had a matric level of education and none of the men had tertiary education. Street people attributed their limited education to early pregnancies; poor families; poor academic performance leading to school dropout; the Apartheid legacy of Bantu education; early cultural marriages, etc. Normally, culture has had women confined to kitchen services, and the rearing of children, with men as the prime breadwinner. Education for women was then considered a luxury. It is no wonder that of the women interviewed on the streets of Welkom, 33.3 percent had a limited education of between Sub A and Standard 4, as compared to 28.6 percent of men in the same category.

Following the South African standard of education, the study classified the sample of people interviewed under the following categories. 33.3 percent of women with Sub A-B level of education, and 14.3 percent of men, without formal education at all, were classified as unqualified and illiterate, respectfully. 28.6 percent of men and 33.3 percent of women with Standards 1 - 4 were classified as under-qualified. 14.3 percent of men and 33.3 percent of women with an education level of between Standards 5 and 8 were graded as partially qualified. 42.9 percent of men with Standards 9, 10, or Matric, were classified as basically qualified.

The study, evidently, demonstrates that the majority of the homeless people possess only reading and writing skills, which cannot provide enough expertise, to compete in the competitive world of our labour market. These results, agree with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (*UNCHS*) report of 1996, which confirmed that homeless people have inadequate education to earn them a high income paying job. Without a decent job, these people cannot provide for their basic needs (*Olufemi, 1997).* It is critical, therefore, that street people are trained in skills such as entrepreneurship, gardening, sewing, bee keeping, poultry, etc. This would make them employable, and self- sustaining.

TABLE 6: EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Nature of Employment	**Men**		**Women**		**Total**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Unemployed	6	85.7	3	100	9	90
Mining	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	10
Total	7	100	3	100	10	100

Source: ***Field Study, 2004.***

Table 6 above, indicated that 85.7 percent men and 100 percent women sampled on the streets of Welkom were unemployed, with women as the most affected group. During the time of the study, only 14.3 percent of men were employed. 14.3 percent of men had worked before drifting into homelessness. None of the women had worked before becoming homeless; and as already indicated, none of them is at work currently. The only means of survival for these women was selling beer, which most often, lands them into trouble with police, for (allegedly) dealing in criminal activities.

Alternatively, men who worked casually would provide them with some financial support, most probably in exchange for sex. This put both parties in danger of sexually transmitted diseases, e.g. the human killer HIV/AIDS. In case of this possibility, the danger is enormous, as these people are exposed to unclean environment without water, sanitation, nutrition, medical facilities, etc. It is critical (for humanitarian reasons), that even if there were no immediate plans to remove these people from the streets, that the government supply them with basic needs; such as nutrition, medical facilities, unemployment grants, and temporary shelter, while awaiting their relocation.

42.8 percent of men claim to have carpentry, bricklaying and electronic skills. However, they reiterated that they never had the opportunity to apply them at any stage. Asked why they had not used them before, and whether they were not contemplating using them in the future. They replied that it was because nobody had shown an interest in hiring them. They attributed this state of affairs to the public's perception of the identity and personality of street people. They said that there was a general public perception that street people were a nuisance, in fond of reaping, where they did not sow. Coupled with the widespread belief that street people have no expertise, education, sense of duty, has worked against the recognition of the basic needs of the homeless street people. The consequence of this is violence, animosity, and discrimination against them.

They complained about the public's negative attitude towards them, considered as a lost generation of "hobos" without anything to offer the society. However, they were quick to acknowledge the fact that the public was not generally negative. They conceded that

although some of the public was very scornful, and hostile towards them, the other section was genuinely empathetic. They commented that they needed more public support than hostility, and condemnation. They expressed desperation, claiming that it was a lack of employment and public support for the homeless people that drove them into criminal activities, such as house breaking, shop lifting, and prostitution, which they themselves condemned in the strongest terms possible. The street people regretted, saying that although the public was hostile to them; they too were to blame for a poor relationship between them and the police. According to them, the creation of job opportunities was the only solution to their state of homelessness and its related criminal activities.

TABLE 7: INCOME

Current Income (Rands)	Men		Women		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
None	6	85.7	3	100	9	90
1 – 600	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
601 – 1200	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	10
Total	7	100	3	100	10	100

Source: ***Field Study, 2004***

Table 7 above, demonstrated that 85.7 percent men and 100 percent women had no source of income. 14.3 percent of men was earning within a range of R 601- 1200. Without sufficient income, or income at all, these people cannot provide for themselves and their families, with basic needs such as food, clothing, water, medication, housing,

etc. While some appreciated the medical services provided by Bongani Regional hospital, and the Municipal clinics in and around Welkom, others reiterated that it was difficult to receive medical services without payment or proper residential address. These exceptions would mean that without an income or fixed residential address the homeless street people are unlikely to access medical facilities.

Asked how they managed their lives on the streets without a source of income to guarantee them daily survival, the street people attributed their precarious existence to a lack of stable income. Their only hope was for the government to address the problem of homelessness holistically, and urgently. According to them, a holistic address of homelessness would mean the same housing rights accorded their counterparts in informal settlements. Asked what treatment they envisaged that matched that of homeless people in shanties and shacks, the street people replied that they envisaged accessible subsidies, unemployment grants, direct provision of RDP housing, accessible black economic empowerment facilities, etc.

Lack of stable and secure incomes was the real issue of concern. It came to my knowledge that stability in this area would normalize the existence of the street people. What was not clear, however, was whether or not; these people's lives would really stabilize with availability of secure income. How often do people sell their subsidy houses, abuse child grants; drink all their monies up? However, we must be cautious against the logic of generalization as prima facie proof, to withdraw support from street people who are direly in need. Whether, or not, they would put such income to proper use is not the issue, the issue is that these people need urgent addressing of their homelessness. Accessibility of sources of income would do just that.

TABLE 8: HOMELESSNESS SPAN

Span in Years	Men		Women		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
0.1 – 1	2	28.6	1	33.3	3	30
2 – 5	1	14.3	1	33.3	2	20
6 – 10	2	28.6	1	33.3	3	30
10 & above	2	28.6	0	0.0	2	20
Total	7	100	3	100	10	100

Source: *Field Study, 2004*

The above table 8 shows that 28.6 percent of men and 33.3 percent of women had been on the street for a period of less than a year. 14.3 percent men and 33.3 percent women had lived rough for the last 2 to 5 years. Those men and women, who spent between 6 and 10 years on the street, constitute 28.6 men, and 33.3 percent women. Those who have been homeless on the streets for over a period of 10 years constitute 28.6 percent men. From the table above, we could conclude that the population of street homelessness decreases with increasing span of homelessness. This might be due to death as a result of old age, street violence, and / or the harsh realities of homelessness. It is also possible that these people are caught up by their relatives, who remove them from the streets, to care for them in their homes. Another possibility would be that these people finally find homes in old age homes or institutions.

TABLE 9: FORMER ABODES

Place	Men		Women		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Family	1	14.3	1	33.3	2	20
Relative	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	10
Husband	0	0.0	2	66.6	2	20
Wife	2	28.6	0	0.0	2	20
Hostel	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	10
Personal	2	28.6	0	0.0	2	20
Total	7	100	3	100	10	100

Source: *Field Study, 2004*

Table 9 above, shows former living places of the homeless street people sampled. 14.3 percent men and 33.3 percent women lived with their families, while relatives provided for another 14.3 percent men. 28.6 percent men and 66.6 percent women were married before becoming street dwellers. Some 14.3 and 28.6 percent men had lived in hostels and personal homes, respectively, before they became homeless. From the table above, several conclusions emerge. First, the homeless street people on the streets of Welkom had never been homeless elsewhere. Second, it is possible that the 28.6 percent men, who left their wives behind were genuinely looking for a better means of supporting them. Third, the 14.3 percent men living with their families were probably young men, who after a certain age had to move out of their parental homes to secure economic independence. Fourth, those relatives were probably, not in a position to continue supporting extra members.

UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS FROM THE VICTIM'S PERSPECTIVE

The street people in Welkom lamented that homelessness was the most dreadful human experience. They dismissed the perception that people in demand of independence and individualism, drift into homelessness to experience them unrestricted. According to them, independence and individualism are the characteristics of the rich, and not the poor. They wondered how poor people like them, depending entirely on the charity of people of good will, could seek to live in isolation without risking death.

Mr. K, a young man aged 22 years and homeless, said that the desire for independence by youth, from parental homes without financial support, leaves them vulnerable. He argued (and rightly so) that it was normal for a young man of his age to seek independence that would teach him about responsibilities. According to him, it could be suicidal for a young man of his age to sit and relax, always depending on his parents. It is, therefore, right and fitting, that they take the risk to explore the world outside parental environment. The perception that homelessness was caused by individual behaviour, or a family's evolution in social values, is regrettable.

Mr. K argued that this perception is only valid if proven that the problems of unemployment, inaccessible government financial support, retrenchments and government's inability to address homelessness holistically, are caused by individual behaviour, or an individual family's social evolution. Mr. K regretted that the intellectuals and the rich foist such perceptions upon the victims, without reaching out to them to consult their feelings about the matter. Miss M. aged, 40 years and homeless, argued that acknowledgement and appreciation of such perceptions, absolves the government of its duty to address the problem. On the contrary, the street people in Welkom viewed homelessness in the light of housing and labour markets, education, cultural stereotypes, government's policies among others. We examine these issues in detail, next.

The Causes of Homelessness

Housing and Labour Markets

The homeless people cited lack of stable employment, available and affordable housing as the primary cause of their housing predicament. They expressed fear for the expansiveness of housing facilities, whose prices had recently skyrocketed-making it even more difficult for middle class workers to purchase homes. If purchasing a home was a nightmare for some people with stable jobs, how easy could it be, for people whose state of poverty and unemployment has compromised their buying power? They asked. Some of them reiterated that before the closing of some mines, and their retrenchment, housing was not an issue, because hostels provided such facilities.

According to them, retrenchment not only deprived them of the right to employment, but also the mine housing facilities. Being profit-oriented companies; the management took the decision to close down hostel facilities in order to cut down extra costs. The mine decision to act quickly was warranted by the fear that should the mine hostels be left to the public, the poor, who could not afford their maintenance, would invade them. This could cost the companies a fortune in terms of water, electricity, sewerage, repair and maintenance. Asked whether the closing of the mines, their retrenchment, and subsequent closure of hostels, decided their fate to stay on the streets, or whether they considered going home; they replied that going home, was not an option. According to Mr. X, aged 55 and homeless, the mine industry had retrenched them without pension benefits. In this sense, argued Mr. X, the mining companies had decided their housing fate.

Mr. X argued that some of them ended up on the streets, because they had no financial support to provide for their return journey home. Asked whether the government could not help them sue the mine companies for breach of contract, Mr. X, answered firmly that it was the government that had failed them in the first place. He wondered how such a government could save them from the claws of retrenchment, or restore, their compensation. Equally problematic, was the issue of how to return home without

financial backup to support their families. Mr. Y, aged 49, exclaimed that it would be embarrassing - very embarrassing - for a black man, who had worked for quite a length of time without returning home, to return suddenly without any support for his family. In order to elude such communal embarrassments and frustrations, shame and guilt, challenges and reprimands, he chose to survive on the streets, where he has nothing to worry about, except for himself. This is the consequence of stereotypes inherent in the black man's culture.

Cultural Stereotypes

Although the housing problem could be explained in economic terms, the issue of cultural stereotypes, with its enormous influence on street homelessness, cannot be denied. It is cultural among black people, for men to provide for their families. It is a cultural anathema, for a black man (to be a man in the cultural sense of the word), if he cannot provide for his family. This leaves black men no alternative, but to move from their rural areas into cities, to look for formal employment that could guarantee an income to maintain their families. Lack of employment in the cities, coupled with cultural stigma associated with a man's inability to cater for his family, easily transfers black men into homelessness.

According to these men, they would rather, stay on the streets than return home, where they would become the laughing stock of the community. It is no wonder that men were the majority on the streets of Welkom. Consequently, women divorce unsupportive husbands such as these. With divorce, women automatically lose their homes. Coupled with uncooperative and unsupportive relatives, women end up on the streets as homeless people. The study confirmed that 66.6 percent of women on the streets of Welkom, were divorcees. Education was another contributing factor to homelessness. We investigate that, next.

Education

The street people in Welkom conceded that a lack of appropriate education and skills made them unemployable in many areas of labour. They argued that illiteracy and unemployment, coupled with an inequitable distributive system of the national cake, exacerbated their inability to access housing facilities among other basic needs. The street people acknowledged the effects of the Apartheid regime on black economic empowerment. They argued that poverty coupled with discrimination, denied them the right to quality education, the results of which are visible and tangible today. However, they regretted that 10 years of democratic dispensation had not yet done enough to translate poverty into prosperity for all. They refuted the fact that a decade of democratic dispensation was not substantial period for the government to have redressed the ills of Apartheid and colonialism. According to them, time was not the issue; the issue was about the government policies, inability to deliver, and mass corruption. We discuss government policy, next.

Government Policies

The homeless street people in Welkom complained that the government had discriminated against them, in terms of social benefits, such as unemployment grants, medical and educational facilities, housing subsidies, etc. They argued that if the government had cared to provide them with social benefits, they would overcome their illiteracy, ignorance, sickness and poverty. Asked whether or not, they were familiar with facilities such as the Adult Based Education and Training (ABET), free medical services available at government clinics, accessible social benefits at the Department of Social Development, in and around Welkom, these people responded that legal documents such as identity books, birth certificates, etc. were a requirement for eligibility. Asked why this was a problem at all, they answered that Home Affairs had on several occasions declined to issue them with these documents, for their lack of fixed address. Due to the reasons we discussed previously, these people were not prepared to return to their homes; hence a vicious circle of no job, no home, no job. We examine the consequences of homelessness, next.

The Consequences of Street Homelessness

Mr. X, aged 55 years, unemployed and homeless, said that street life was violent and dangerous. It endangers the physical and mental well-being of the victim. He said that different groups of street people have different habits. This could be due to different age groups. Obviously, the youth would keep themselves away from elderly people. Beggars do not mix well with robbers. Drug addicts would prefer dilapidated buildings, to carry out their transactions. The homeless people, based on their differences, end up living in different zones exclusive to distinct groups. These zones are jealously guarded against rivalry groups. Crossing over zonal boundaries by one group would be considered by another as a breach of territorial contract, which could start a war between the two rival groups. Competition, rivalry and / or quarrels amongst different groups, expose victims to violence. Whenever fighting is involved, there is likelihood of losing lives and looting of goods, because weapons such as flick-knives, coshes or homemade weapons are used against the foe. Mr. X said that you must never make enemies, or pick up a quarrel with a foe, because you could easily be killed.

Mr. X said that there was a poor relationship between homeless street people and the community of Welkom. He reiterated that while some Welkomites were empathetic and helpful, others were resentful, angry and repulsive - a point corroborated by Swart in his research with the street children of Hillbrow, Johannesburg (*Swart, 1989 cited in Boyden and Holden, 1991*). He said that street people were viewed as idle, rootless and scavenging animals, living on the welfare payments of the state, stealing or begging, without making a useful contribution to society. Mr. Y, aged 49, said that the authorities and public resented the homeless street people as violent, criminal and inconsiderate - a perception corroborated by Boyden and Holden *(1991)* as universal. He said that the perception had founded police harassment of street people, on allegations of prostitution, drugs, loitering, gambling, vagrancy, theft and other crimes. Although he acknowledged some street people's involvement in criminal activities, e.g. shoplifting, and housebreaking among other misdemeanors, Mr. Y, decried that the subjection of the innocent majority to arbitrary police brutality as pure cruelty.

He cited arresting of women for selling beer to earn some income, as such an example of police brutality. Ms N aged, 45 years and homeless, commented that they were always controlled, for fear that their spread on the streets would damage the image of the the city. The public viewed them as a potential danger to socio-economic development. Thus, instead of enjoying public support and protection, they suffer repression. Another point highlighted by Boyden and Holden *(1991)* as universal. Mr. Y said that street people live under unbearable conditions, one would describe as brutal to humanity. Unemployment is a real concern, and when some casual work is available with contracting companies (which always work to maximize their profits), the conditions involved are backbreaking. Labour is buttressed with long hours of toiling without matching income. The anomaly could be attributed to the fact that labour laws and policies that regulate time and wages do not constitute this class of labour force. The street people resented a widespread public perception, that they cherish independence and individualism-unrestricted-on the streets.

They argued that such perception was detrimental to their well-being, because it ignores their painful experience of alienation and exclusion from the society, to which whole they are part. According to them, the perception completely ignores the fears, hopelessness and helplessness street people experience on a daily basis. Equally ignored, is their loss of confidence and security, dignity and respect, identity and privacy, which drown them into a sea of drugs, where they swim in addiction, to help them battle with their daily humiliations. The perception, therefore, that homeless people cherish the independence and freedom that exist outside the norms and regulations of society, were demoralizing. Moreover, it absolves the community of its moral duty, to respect the principle of "umntu, ngumntu ngabantu"- a person is a person, because of people.

Homeless People's Solution to Homelessness

The homeless people described the problem of homelessness and its solutions in a practical sense, as opposed to the condemning political and campaigning languages of the politicians and organizations. Although the homeless street people might be scientifically or politically incapable of explaining the causes of homelessness, in terms of structural

factors, their situation is clearly practical, namely unemployment, and unavailable and unaffordable housing. The practicality of their human conditions clearly exemplifies an urgent need for the provision of employment, which most of the time the homeless people reiterated as the most basic need, followed by housing. According to them, the solution to homelessness was not mere provisioning of physical structures called houses. Rather, the solution resided in employment, whose stable income would provide street people with either rental or homeownership facilities. They argued that provision of houses without jobs would still render them the problem of affordability, in terms of municipal services and rates, which would still push them back into homelessness. They believe that they could create sustainable development, if the government provided them with enabling possibilities, e.g. financial support to kick-start their lives.

Ironically, some street people proposed solutions that echoed those of the left-wing politicians, in apportioning structural blame, in view of effecting change in housing and labour market policies. The majority of the homeless people I interviewed presented their conditions of homelessness not as individual culpability, but structurally based. For most of them, the solution to homelessness had more to do with the changing of housing and labour market policies than the individual behaviour of homeless people. They highlighted their situation as desperate, in need of urgent attention as compared to long discussions of policy change, whose long-term fruits have no bearing on their current situation. The question we are asking is the objective and thrust of this study; namely, how is the Welkom council responding, or addressing the problem of street homelessness in its jurisdiction? We investigate that, next.

LOCAL COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO STREET HOMELESSNESS IN WELKOM

The council's response to the problem of street homelessness in Welkom was viewed strictly within the framework of its policies, projects and programmes that target the housing needs of homeless people. The council confirmed that indeed, the problem of street homelessness is rife in Welkom city. The council attributed the cause of the problem to various reasons. We discuss those reasons, next.

The Council's understanding of Homelessness in Welkom

Decline in Mining Industry

According to the council, the mining industry attracted labour from within South Africa and across its borders. Migrant workers came from neighbouring countries such as Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland, etc. This led to a demographic boom in Welkom. Unfortunately, the mining industry could not absorb the entire labour force that had flooded the Goldfields. This created enormous unemployment, and housing problems for the city of Welkom. The problem was further exacerbated by decline in the mining industry that followed later in 1980's and 1990's. Mine workers were retrenched and hostels closed down. A continuous inflow of migrant workers, coupled with non-return of the retrenched people to their respective homes (for whatever reasons) further exacerbated the mushrooming of the Thabong and Bronville informal settlements, with the rest spilling onto the streets.

Welkom is currently experiencing a problem of massive unemployment. In addressing the problem of unemployment, the council said that it was translating some mines into industries, e.g. Virginia Jewellry, as part of the strategy. The council had drawn a financial programme, to provide financial support for those people interested in becoming entrepreneurs. The council however, could not establish whether or not Virginia Jewelry had benefited any street person with employment. Equally problematic, was whether or not, some street people had been targeted for financial boosts as future entrepreneurs. The council also confirmed that there were plans underway to establish an international Cargo airport in Welkom. According to the council, the realization of the project would boost economic benefits for the Welkomites, and curb the problem of unemployment to some degree. The Council, however, failed to demonstrate, as to how the project would benefit homeless Welkomites economically, given their limited skills. Despite educational programmes, such as the Adult Based Education and Training (ABET), that target to redress skill challenges, there was still no proof that street people would benefit directly from the scheme. The international cargo airport has since, been taken to Mafikeng, in the North West; due to poor handling of the transactions by the Welkom Council.

Education

The council attributed the problem of street homelessness in Welkom to a low standard of education among the homeless people. Most of the people who worked within the mining industry, had limited education and skills. This was the cause for failure by most of these people to access employment outside the mining industry. The council attributed widespread illiteracy among black homeless people, to Bantu education orchestrated by the Apartheid regime. The system had little to offer in terms of skills, and today its victims have little to offer the demanding world of technical labour. The abandoning of schooling, by young black men, who joined the struggle for liberation, further exacerbated illiteracy.

When the former government of the National Party entered negotiations with the African National Congress, towards a peaceful transition to democratic dispensation in South Africa, the liberation movements were disbanded. Unfortunately, most of them were not incorporated into the South Africa National Defense Force. Equally unfortunate, was that these young men had little education and skills to match the current (technical) labour market. For some, the mining industry became the only hope in overcoming their financial predicament. However, following the problems associated with the industry we discussed earlier, they became homeless. Hence, poor education is directly linked with high rate of unemployment and poverty, the prime cause of homelessness in Welkom.

Asked what the council was doing in this regard, to alleviate the problem, the council replied that in order to make the unskilled and the unemployable homeless people skilful and employable, the local authority had introduced learnership and internship to capacitate them. They cited the Virginia Jewelry industry in Welkom as such an example of educational strategy to improve people's lives. However, the Council was quick to acknowledge that the government's response through its progressive programmes, was slow. Even if the situation were different, the process would not just happen overnight. Moreover, the retraining of these people does not necessarily imply immediate eradication of illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and / or homelessness.

The Council said that illiteracy in most cases fosters unemployment, which in turn nurtures poverty. According to the Council, poverty was further exacerbated by a lack of legal documents for the street people. A Lack of education had contributed to poor understanding by homeless people about their rights and duties; where and how to access information about social services; where to seek and obtain government assistance; the importance of legal documents, etc. Without all this information at hand, the street people were bound to suffer enormously. Unfortunately, nobody from either side wants to take the blame. While the homeless people on the one hand, claim that the government had no time for them, the government on the other hand, point fingers at the homeless people for failure to take responsibility for their own destiny. Despite all this, it was obvious that a lack of education was sufficient cause for unemployment, poverty, and homelessness. This was, according to the council, further exacerbated by a lack of a research department.

Human and Financial Resources

The council said that it was facing serious problems from a lack of human and financial resources to deliver efficient and effective services; legislation frameworks within which to deliver services; and research facilities among other difficulties. The Council attributed financial constraints, to council's unfunded mandate; culture of non-payment of the Municipal rates and services due to poverty, unemployment, or irresponsible behaviour of the residents. The devolution of powers to local authorities without sufficient resources and incentives for the developers, make it more difficult for the local authority to replace the lost stock. This exacerbated the problem of homelessness, a fact corroborated by Bond and Tait (*1997*), and Tomlinson (*1999*).

The demarcation process, which incorporated 6 other independent Municipalities into Welkom council without retrenching their respective staff, or their combinations, exacerbated the problem of human and financial viability. Lack of institutional capacity, in terms of expertise and institutional framework, make it difficult for the local authorities to coordinate programmes. For example, while the system constitutes 3, 678

posts, the current council's labour force is only 2, 229 (*Field study, 2004*). Hence 1, 449 positions remain unfilled, and this has serious consequences on service delivery. In other words, while ineffective and inefficient service delivery, could be attributed to people's incompetence, the truth that these people are overloaded to provide effective and efficient services, cannot be ignored. Equally problematic, is the fact that the subcategory of street homelessness does not fall within the legal housing framework of the council. This subcategory is not represented in the national housing policy either. Although the council acknowledges its existence, its severity in Welkom, the value of statistics in identifying the problem, its prevalence, and developmental trends, and measures of control; the 4 officials were quick to comment that outside the legal housing mandate, there is nothing the council could do. Hence the Council could not establish correctly the pervasiveness of street homelessness in Welkom. We discuss the National housing policy, next.

The National Housing Policy.

The council reiterated that although the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), was an integrated socio-economic policy framework, adopted by the government to mobilize national and human resources, towards sustainable housing; street homelessness was not, reflected in the National Housing Policy. There is no clause whatsoever that empowers the council with a political, financial or legal mandate to provide housing for street people. The RDP policies, projects and programmes target only the informal settlements (shanty dwellers). The council acknowledged regrettably that it was indeed, a problem of great concern within the council, to provide housing for one category of homelessness, while neglecting another. They argued that it was not in the interest of the council to house the homeless people in the informal settlements, while ignoring those in total open cold. However, they emphasized the fact that without a nationally or provincially delegated mandate, to address street homelessness, the council has no the mandate to act, in this regard.

The council expressed its frustrations by saying that although the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) policy emphasized the removal of discriminatory

mechanisms, creation of affordable housing for the disadvantaged, and provision of financial assistance for the poor; the process was marginal, discriminative, and indeed slow. The council attributed marginal, discriminative, and slow housing delivery to the non-inclusive housing policy; lack of council's legal, and financial mandate; and a long process of stabilization of the council, as a result of continuous institutional restructuring. However, it became clear that the problem was neither the pace of delivery, nor stabilization of the council; but simply the non-existence of programmes that strictly address, or approach street homelessness holistically. Despite the government's efforts to convert the mine hostels, into family housing units, as an alternative housing strategy for the homeless, the council commented that exclusive housing of shack dwellers is bound to resolve, but exacerbate homelessness. Even with developments, such as these, in Reahola, without the council's legal housing mandate, the problems of street homelessness, will forever, remain unresolved. The council, therefore, concluded that there is dire need for an inclusive policy framework and legislation that addresses homelessness, holistically.

CONCLUSION

We have finally come to the conclusion of the question at the beginning of this study, namely; how is the Welkom council responding to street homelessness in its jurisdiction. The study described the results of the fieldwork, which was done with a sample of street homeless people and the local authority of Welkom council, using open-ended questions. Open-ended interviews were the methodology of data collection. 70 percent men and 30 percent women, on the streets of Welkom, were interviewed. The respondents were aged between 20 and 59 years. Most of them had spent between 5 and 10 years, on the streets. 66.6 percent and 33.3 percent women were divorcees and single, respectively. 71.4 percent men and 100 percent women, had children. 28.6 percent men and 66.6 percent of women had an average of 6 children. 71.4 percent men and 100 percent women had never worked before. 28.6 percent was shared equally, by the retrenched and the currently workingmen, with the mining industry around Welkom. 85.7 percent of men and 100 percent of women interviewed were unemployed on the streets of Welkom.

Of the total population interviewed, 30 percent were rated as qualified, 20 percent partially qualified, 30 percent under-qualified, and those classified as unqualified and illiterate were represented by 10 percent each. The homeless street people, therefore, could not be generally classified as illiterate people, because some of them had acquired an average education as demonstrated above. The findings of this study revealed that almost all street dwellers in Welkom were from black ethnic groupings, with men being the most affected. All these people were South Africans, lured to Welkom by mining opportunities. However, the decline in the mining industry, closure of mine hostels, retrenchment without pension pay-out, cultural stereotypes, lack of skills for employment in other sectors, lack of financial support to return home, or own rental facilities, lack of available and affordable housing facilities (or a combination) turned the streets into homes for some of the retrenched mineworkers.

The study also discussed socio-economic characteristics of the homeless street people, in terms of age, marital status, ethnic background, educational standard, occupational and income levels, former abodes, homelessness span, causes and consequences of homelessness, and homeless people's solution to homelessness. The position of the local authority of Welkom on the issue of street homelessness as the focus of this study was discussed. During the discussion, it came out clearly, that although there were several progressive programmes, policies and legislation to guide the provision of housing for the homeless people; it covered only the category of shanty dwellers. Even here, the process of housing development was very slow. The housing policies and legislation framework as the guide for the local authority in addressing homelessness were discussed. It turned out, as corroborated by Olufemi (*1997*), that no housing policy or legislation framework to cater for street homelessness existed. Coupled with socio-economic, political and legal challenges, the local authority lacked the mandate to house street people, who existed outside the stipulated homelessness.

Despite pervasive scenario of homelessness, the council acknowledged that very little was happening, in terms of addressing the problem. Critical to this scenario, is the call for complete overhaul of the housing policy, towards a new housing policy that encapsulates

all categories of homelessness. In other words, there is need to overhaul the entire housing policy to make it inclusive. The council said that research was needed in this regard. According to the council, the research would establish the rate of homelessness, and its magnitude. This would inform the trend of the new housing policy. Failure to establish the department of research would be tantamount to failure, in the eradication of street homelessness in particular, and homelessness in general. The council argued that it was now more necessary, than ever before, to empower and capacitate them with human and financial resources, if they are to deliver housing mandatory holistically, efficiently, and effectively.

Equally important, is the need to incorporate the victims of street homelessness. I discovered during the study, that they too, could contribute in offering solutions to their problem of homelessness. The participation of homeless people, in the process of housing delivery, would provide opportunities for them, to learn about their rights and responsibilities. Effective participation would, therefore, mean that they receive some education that would empower them with skills to be employable, useful, and responsible. In addition, every concerted effort is ardently needed, to promote cooperation in partnerships of all societal sectors, to participate in the process of policy formulation. Balanced participation between the local authority and the beneficiaries, and interdepartmental coordination, could resolve urban housing needs in general. Most importantly, the study ends on a very serious note, namely; a holistic approach to effective, efficient, and sustainable housing provision, requires the government to overhaul the entire current National Housing Policy, to make it inclusive.